

Christian Ambassadors

On the 2nd of August, 1990, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait shocked the world. Within days the world's attention turned to a number of foreign embassies in Kuwait City. Would the Iraqi army defy international law and break into these embassies? How would they treat the embassy staff? To invade embassies or harm ambassadors would be a direct confrontation with the countries they represent.

The sending of an ambassador or a representative from one country to another has been common practice for centuries. In the New Testament, the word ambassador is used twice. The apostle Paul first used this image to help Christians understand their role on earth. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors," he wrote, "as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). And later, when shut up in prison he explained: "I am an ambassador in chains" (Ephesians 6:20). The image of the Christian as an ambassador of Jesus Christ is just as lucid today.

1. As ambassadors we represent Christ

There is no such thing as an independent or freelance ambassador. Ambassadors by definition represent those who have sent them. The same is true for the Christian. Whether we are aware of it or not, as Christians we represent Christ. Many non-Christians will never open a Bible but will look at how you and I live. What are they concluding as they watch what I do? Does my life reflect something of Christ's humility and selflessness, His gentleness and righteousness?

Living conscious of the fact that we represent Christ at home, at work, at school, at church and in our neighbourhood, must affect the way we view:

- Ourselves - there is no room for inferiority or superiority complexes. We are very valuable because Christ chose us to represent Him. Yet He chose us because of His grace, not because we were or are so fantastic.
- Suffering - some of the inconveniences we experience come our way because we represent Christ. God may allow some suffering to make us better representatives of "the Man of Sorrows."

- Sin – our sin not only affects our communion with the Lord, it may also affect how other people will think of Jesus.

2. As ambassador we have a purpose

Ambassadors are not sent abroad for the fun of it! Neither are they sent away to get rid of them! Similarly, we Christians are not left on earth just to kill time “until He comes,” neither are we put here that we may live to please ourselves. Paul prayed for the Colossian Christians in order that they “may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10). What drives the Christian is the desire to please God rather than himself. In everything he does, a good ambassador seeks to further the interest of those he represents. Is my way of life furthering God’s purposes on earth?

3. As ambassadors we are always foreigners

Many ambassadors live here in London, England. Some have lived in England for a couple of months, others for years, yet none of them are British citizens! They are all foreigners. Ambassadors with British passports do exist, yet none of them live in Britain. The nature of an ambassador’s job forces him to live away from home, therefore as long as he is an ambassador he will be a foreigner. In his first letter, Peter refers to Christians a number of times as “strangers.” He urges Christians to “live your lives as strangers in reverent fear.” “Dear friends,” he adds, “I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires” (1 Peter 1:1, 17; 2:11).

As ambassadors of Jesus Christ we operate under different rules from those of the world we live in. Our standards differ. The value we place on things differs. The great danger is for us to adopt the values of the world around us and thus cease to live as foreigners. Paul’s words are both clear and strong: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Does the use of my time, my energy and my money agree with the divine call to live as a foreigner in this world?

4. As ambassadors we are accountable to Christ

The Peruvian ambassador who lives in Spain does not receive salary from the Spanish government, but from his own government back in Peru. This gives him the independence he needs to take, if necessary, “unpopular news” to the Spanish government without the fear of losing his job. Even though he lives in Spain, he takes orders from and is accountable to the Peruvian government. I find that there are many people I would like to please: my dear wife, my family and friends, fellow Christians, my employer. Yet amid these legitimate desires I must not forget that as an ambassador of Jesus Christ I am finally accountable to Him alone. “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before him *to whom we must give account*” (Hebrews 4:13).

5. As ambassadors we are on a limited contract

The title of ambassador is not one of those which is given for life. On retirement or for a number of other reasons an ambassador may be called home. His mission is thus drawn to an end. It is a source of encouragement and gladness to know that God has no intentions of leaving any Christian here on earth forever. We all function on limited contracts. When our job here on earth is complete, we shall be called home. And what a joy that will be!

6. As ambassadors we may find ourselves in chains

The second time the apostle Paul refers to himself as an ambassador, he is asking for prayer: "that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains" (Ephesians 6:19-20). Even though Paul found himself restricted in prison, he did not cease to see himself as an ambassador of Christ - with its associated dignity and with its responsibilities. Many Christians today also find themselves in chains not of their own making. Do you feel your Christian ministry restricted because you look after young children or an elderly parent? Are you frustrated because you didn't receive that visa, because you suffer from ill health, because of reduced finances, because of infirmities of old age? Perhaps you can't do today what you used to do or what you would like to do? By God's grace even with our restrictions and limitations (which God has allowed) we are still His ambassadors - like Paul, ambassadors in chains!

It is not, however, for us to choose chains. Unnecessary commitments and misplaced affections will hinder our ability to be good ambassadors of Christ. We are urged to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Conclusion

Every Christian is an ambassador of Jesus Christ. We don't belong down here. We are on a mission to advance His interests in this world. Those who are seeking Christ should be able to find Him when they meet us. Our time as ambassadors shall soon be over. Jesus Himself said "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3). Until that happy moment, may you and I be active and faithful ambassadors. Who will you meet today?

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